The Minor Prophets

Zanesville, OH | Sunday AM Bible Study | January 21, 2018

**Introduction**

* The Minor prophets is a collection of 12 inspired books found in the Old Testament with prophesies ranging from about 780 BC to 400BC. They are referred to as the “Minor Prophets” largely because of the concise content and smaller portions of messages they contain in comparison to the Major Prophets.
* The Minor Prophets include: **Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.**
* The Major Prophets include: **Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel.**
* The Minor Prophets can be divided up into the following periods in which they prophesied:

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| **The Assyrian Period** | **The Babylonian Period** | **Return from Captivity** |
| Jonah 783-753 | Zephaniah 640-628 | Haggai 520 ca. |
| Amos 760-750 | Habakkuk 609-597 | Zechariah 520-519 |
| Hosea 755-710 | Obadiah 586 ca. | Malachi 430-400 |
| Micah 739-686 |  | Joel |
| Nahum 664-612 |  |  |

* Generally speaking, most of the books in the bible are difficult to date and such is also the case with these 12 books of prophecies. The dates listed in the above table is more or less the time period during which these prophets spoke their messages from God. The prophet Joel is considered the most difficult to date. Some scholars suggest a time period of ca. 845 BC while others suggest ca. 430 BC.

**What is a Prophet?**

* Perhaps the best way to proceed in defining the term prophet is looking at the scriptures to see what God says about the term.
* **Exodus 4:10-17** gives us the basic meaning of the word which is one who speaks for another.
* In terms of the prophets of scripture, these were individuals who spoke messages from God to His people.
* **Numbers 12:1-7** offers us some important details about the means through which God spoke to the prophets.
* Visions and dreams were the two general means via which God revealed His messages to the prophets that they would then speak to the people. Moses seems to be an exception to this since God says, “Not so with my servant Moses. With him I speak mouth to mouth” (**Num. 12:7-8**).
* Prophets in the bible never spoke according to their own will but God’s will only (**Heb. 1:1; 2 Pet. 2:19-21).**
* Other helpful passages to consider in terms of the definition and duty of a prophet include: **Deuteronomy 18:18-19; Jeremiah 1:4-10, 17-19; Ezekiel 3:4, 10, 27.**
* Perhaps no other statement in the prophets drives home the idea of the messages coming directly from God more so than the phrase: **“Thus says the LORD.”**
* The prophets were primarily considered to be forth-tellers although quite a few of their messages were considered to be fore-telling as well.
* Some important prophetic figures in the Old Testament include: Abraham (**Gen. 20:7**), Moses (**Num. 12:1-7**), Samuel (**1 Sam. 3:19-20**), Elijah (**1 Kings 17-2 Kings 2**), Elisha (**2 Kings 2-9**).
* The word “prophet” may sometimes be connected with someone acting like a madman. See **1 Kings 18:29, Ezekiel 4-5, 2 Kings 9:11.**

**Keys to Understanding Minor Prophets**

* **Context.** In any given study of a bible book or books, if one does not remain in the context with which the message is being spoken, the understanding of the meaning will be lost and/or twisted to their own demise.
* **Political and Cultural setting.** The political structure and power was vastly different during that time in comparison to modern day government structures. The culture also affects the way we read and understand a large portion of these messages God conveyed to the people since it was large an ancient near eastern type culture they practiced. The common Suzerain-Vassal relationship is vital to one’s understanding in reference to the prophetic messages.
* **God’s relationship with His people and the nations around them.** Many of the minor prophets focus heavily on judgment of Israel and Judah but also to the Gentile nations surrounding His holy nation. We must seek to understand the relationship God has with all these nations as that can help us better understand the messages contained within these prophecies.
* **Literal and Figurative Language.** I have encountered far too many people that take everything the bible says literally and others that go the other extreme and say it’s just all a symbolistic story to motivate us to be good people. Both are used extensively in these messages and they are critical to the overall themes and meanings of the text to be studied.
* **Grammatical Construction.** The Hebrew language, the original language of the Old Testament, is not remotely similar to our English construction today. Expressions, patterns and style lend us a very helpful hand in properly interpreting the messages God gave His people through the prophets. While there are very few people who still speak and write the language today, we are able to access dictionaries and sources online to help us understand God’s magnificent revelations.
* **Looking ahead to the Messiah.** Most if not all of these prophetic messages share one essential goal. They all point towards the climax of God’s holy plan: Salvation through Jesus Christ. The picture of the sin of the nations, a call for repentance and God’s great deliverance is ultimately fulfilled in the selfless, suffering, sacrificial servant that is Jesus Christ our Lord. The minor prophets are riddled with prophecies concerning the coming Savior and underlying points which center our minds on that event.

**Typical Prophetic Pattern (T. Peeler)**

1. The people have committed sin and they have been called to repent
2. If they do not repent, God will send judgment
3. After they experience judgment, restoration will take place